

INTERNET

Starwood, L'Oreal leverage social media for customer service, brand loyalty

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By RACHEL LAMB

Approximately 96 percent of companies including Starwood Hotels & Resorts and L'Oreal use social media for marketing and advertising, meaning that it can be used to not only attract and keep brand loyalists but to see ROI, according to findings from a new study.

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Brands were asked to rank social media importance, as well as how it has changed the way they are marketing across all channels, according to findings from a study by Booz&Co. and Buddy Media Research released at the IAB MIXX Conference and Expo 2011. Most brands have stepped up their social media marketing in addition to using it in new and inventive ways.

“For us, the biggest change that social media has brought is in customer service,” said Alyssa Waxenberg, senior director of emerging platforms for Starwood Hotels & Resorts, New York.

“It’s easy for people to post on our Facebook and write reviews,” she said. “It also helps us to help them when things are wrong, as well as allowing us to shape the brand

experience.”

Social awareness

Starwood comprises a total of nine hotel brands including luxury hotel chains such as the St. Regis and Luxury Collection in multiple countries worldwide.

Over the last few months, the hotelier has built up its Starwood Preferred Guest programs as well as multiple programs in its hotel chains.

The main reason why Starwood uses social media is for customer service.

Consumers can post and ask for help on the Facebook and Twitter feeds, but the medium also comes in handy when guests or potential guests are having trouble at one of the locations.

Corporate representatives who monitor the page can alert a particular hotel if a consumer is unhappy.

In contrast, if consumers post that they are celebrating something such as an anniversary or birthday at a Starwood location, the hotel can plan ahead to shape the experience.

However, picking the social media-savvy employees is crucial.

The social media marketers at L’Oreal are both creative and analytical – a blend of right and left brain and very passionate, according to Rachel Weiss, assistant vice president of digital strategy and interactive marketing at L’Oreal.

“They are flexible, entrepreneurial and live and breathe social media every day of their lives,” Ms. Weiss said. “It’s important to choose people who already live this lifestyle so that you can really get a feel as to how involved they are.”

Three-step program

The three most important aspects of social media marketing are community management, content management and analytics, according to Karen Guterl, senior marketing and communications manager at Booz, New York.

The first step is how to keep the company growing and the fan bases happy.

Some of the most important aspects of a community manager are the ability to be outgoing, think on the fly and the ability to engage and establish a voice with the audience.

The second-most important component of social media marketing is content management.

However, this content not only needs to attract eyeballs but engage consumers and weave a dynamic story.

The entire purpose of social media is to get some interaction, per Ms. Guterl.

The third component of social media marketing is analytics.

Most marketers are at the first level, where they know how many fans they have and the

number of comments on a post, but this is not enough anymore.

Brands need to find a way to attract brand advocates, keep them and then see ROI.

"It's not about planning a message and putting it out there," Ms. Guterl said. "Marketing has become more real-time, always on and ever-evolving.

"Marketers have to change the way they are marketing and the skills they need," she said.

"Social media needs to be interwoven and embedded in marketing.

"What we found is that of the companies we studied, social media is no longer at the periphery, rather in the center and integrated in marketing programs today."

Final Take

Rachel Lamb, associate reporter on Luxury Daily

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